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# THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER

FEBRUARY, 1905

THE SCHOOL AT ABBOTSHOLME, CONDUCTED BY  
DR. CECIL REDDIE<sup>1</sup>

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Edinburgh

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## I

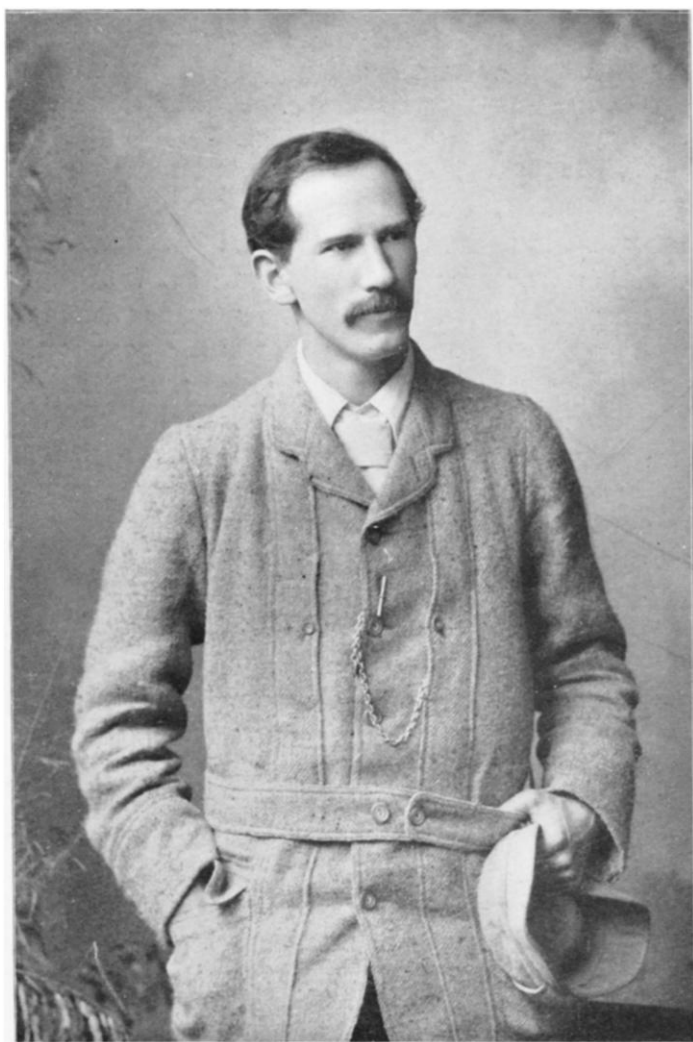
### INTRODUCTION

While personally of Scottish, London, and foreign education, I may claim to be in some respects all the more alive to the qualities of the English public-school and university systems, although, as is inevitable under such circumstances, also awake to their defects.

I have hence long been interested in Dr. Reddie's labors to create a school which, while retaining the admitted virtues of English education, should yet meet the requirements of the modern world in a more adequate way. I have felt substantial agreement with his vigorous criticisms of the educational world, and admiration for his no less fearless initiative; and I have often regretted that, here as so often, the prophet should still have too little honor in his own country. For many years I have directed foreign educationalists to Abbotsholme as the most active and progressive of English schools. One especially, M. Demolins, has made it the text of a well-known volume.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This article is an extract from a report on the school prepared by Professor Geddes. It is based upon a personal inspection of the school made July 11-18, 1904.—EDITORS.

<sup>2</sup> M. Demolins, *Anglo-Saxon Superiority* (from the French eighth edition), London, 1901.



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Many independent visitors—French, German, American, etc.—have also from time to time communicated their impressions to the larger world, with comparisons strongly in favor of Abbotsholme, and these on many grounds. Better than criticism, however, the school has afforded an educational type, upon which, whether with generous acknowledgement or with insufficient recognition, new schools have been founded, alike on the continent and at home. Even in the present month I find in an important French review<sup>3</sup> an article by the director of the school of Liancourt, himself an English public-school boy and teacher of varied experience; and he, while an active rival and critic of M. Demolins, goes almost farther in his eulogy of Abbotsholme, and in the severity of his criticisms of the older type of school,<sup>4</sup> to which it is the arduous honor of Abbotsholme to furnish an example and lead.

Though thus interested in Abbotsholme since its foundation, indeed its very inception, I had unfortunately never found time to visit it; it was therefore with much interest that I accepted the invitation of the headmaster and trustees to undertake an inspection and report last July. To this inspection I devoted the whole of one week's residence, with some preparation beforehand, and considerable reflection since my visit.

Even if space permitted, I need not here enter into any detailed account of the organization of the school, especially as this is already clearly stated in its founder's writings and in the descriptions of previous visitors. While thus visiting the school with an open mind, sympathetic indeed to all its main aspects, I have been more especially prepared by my own work and studies to inquire into two matters in particular: (1) the Abbotsholme endeavors toward that better-organized associated life which is too much neglected in our Scottish education; and (2) the experimental working-out of a modernized curriculum, with adequate correlation and succession of studies—geographic and historic; scientific, linguistic, and literary; practical and artistic;

<sup>3</sup> Scott, "L'éducation nouvelle," *Revue politique et parlementaire*, August, 1904.

<sup>4</sup> R. F. Cholmeley, "A Complaint of Public Schools," *Independent Review*, September, 1904, will also be found worth consulting.

in brief, naturalistic and humanistic. Both of these endeavors have, of course, to be judged, not merely by the traditional standards of the universities, but by their adaptation to practical life and social usefulness.

Thus, while I have visited the school prepared by an understanding of its general aims, it has also been in acceptance of a frankly expressed invitation to search out and unsparingly to criticise any weak spots in the ambitious program of the school or in the execution of it, and with the understanding that the more definite my criticisms and suggestions, the better for all concerned.

The following report, then, while warmly appreciative of many elements in the school, though with sharp criticisms of others, may risk conveying misunderstanding to some, especially strangers to it, since in analyzing the character of a school, as of a person, points of blame may to many seem to outweigh larger elements of praise. It is, however, I am convinced, the wish of the headmaster and the council, of the parents, the old boys, and other friends of the school, that every possible improvement should be made; and my desire is to be of service toward this.

I can most easily give my impressions of Abbotsholme by writing, in direct narrative form, a summary of my diary during my week's stay. Before my arrival a week had been devoted mainly to written examinations, and this had prepared stacks of papers for my perusal. Then haymaking had come, a welcome change of occupation for the boys, and giving also the masters time to look over the examination work.

I arrived on a Monday evening. Field work was in full activity. Never before had I seen a hay-field cleared with such order and rapid progress, yet all without the supervision of masters or the help of a farm laborer, the only exception being that the farm baliff himself was working with one of the boys upon the rick—the spot where the elder's skill was still needed to guard against the risks arising from inexperience.

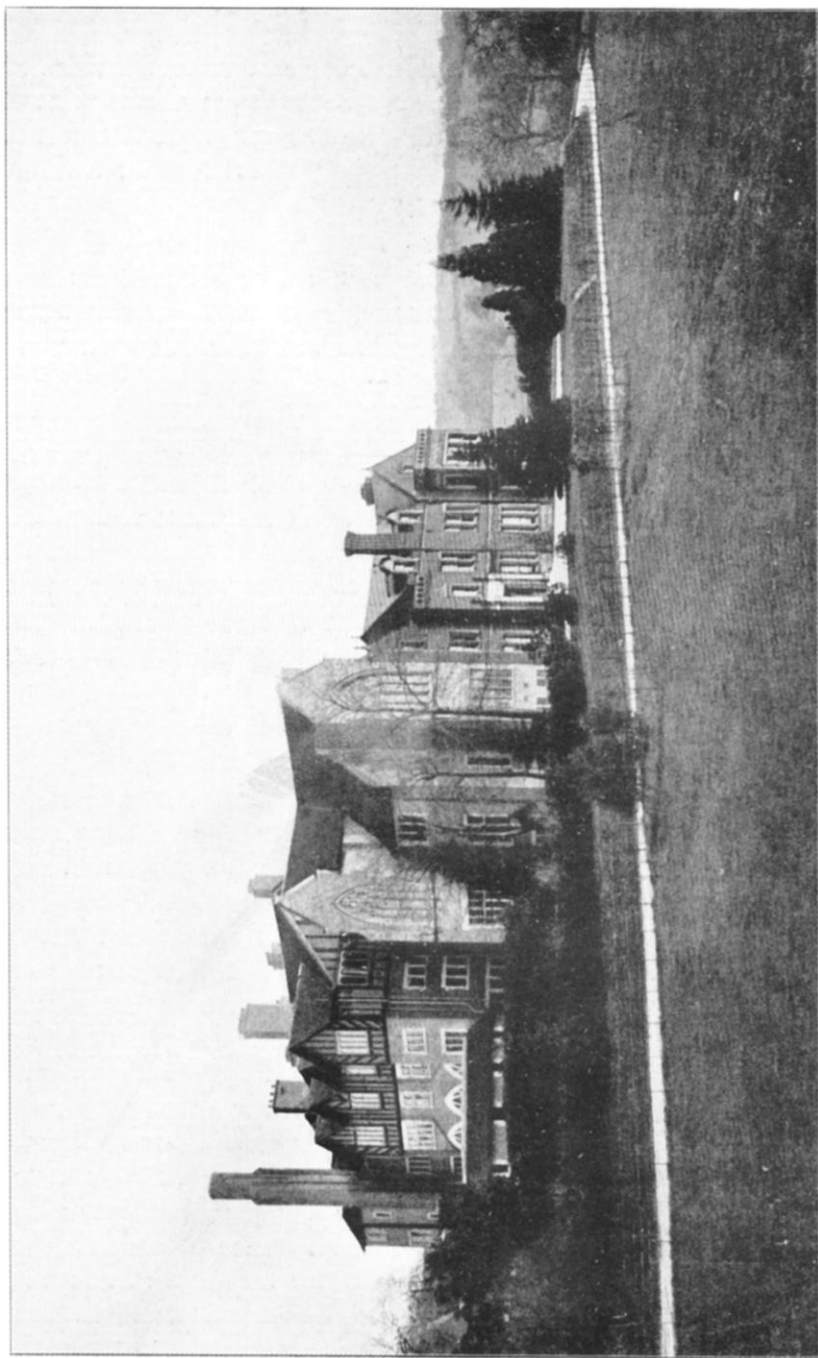
The whole field was under the command of the "captain of haymaking," a senior boy, who had six squads, each under a corporal, one managing the cart, the rest loading or raking. The

swiftness and order, the economy of labor, the cleanness of the field, all showed not only good organization, but thorough good-will.

After a couple of hours of this came the call to bathing, and in a twinkling the glowing workers were in the river. Here a fresh bit of organization appeared. Another boy-officer was on the bridge above the bathing-place conducting the "swimming tests." Every boy not disqualified by health is expected to go through a regular course, graduated from the simplest swimming, within depth and for short distances, to the difficult task of rescue work. That particular evening the diving tests were being passed, and, as an old examiner, I could not but admire the boy examiner at his work, passing or rejecting, usually with instant decision, yet wherever doubt arose giving a second, and in one case a third, chance.

A hearty and wholesome supper, well served in a spacious and dignified refectory hall, followed, and then a brief choral service, with well-chosen reading, in the stately though simple school chapel. From such an evening one could not but gather a favorable impression of this little community, vigorous in work and play, with its atmosphere at once of discipline and of culture.

Next morning, after chapel and breakfast, I was conducted by one of the senior boys over the school buildings old and new. We began with the magnificent "new block," of which the chapel and dining-hall furnish the main architectural features, but including also extensive kitchen and domestic accommodation in the two lower floors, with well-arranged dormitories, guest-chambers and sickrooms above, and at the top a skilfully isolated floor for infectious cases. Thence we passed to the old buildings, in which the larger rooms are used as classrooms and dormitories. The extensive outbuildings are utilized as workshops and laboratories, etc. As it was the annual haymaking time, the classrooms were empty, and field work was in full progress till bathing and dinner time. So unconventional a departure from ordinary school traditions as this of holidays for work instead of for merely play, no doubt helped to explain the vigor and steadiness of work which struck me during my visit. It showed that the school is guarding against



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the too common mistake of expecting simultaneous efforts of mental and bodily exertion from growing boys, and is doing this by the sensible method of giving each of these culminating functions of the school year, examinations and haymaking, their proper turn. This raises the whole question of the school time-tables, both for day, week, term, and even year; but to these I shall return.

After dinner came another characteristic and admirable feature of the school life; the boys trooped up to the chapel for ten or twenty minutes' quiet, while someone, master or boy, gave a musical recital, which happened today to be one of the master-pieces of Wagner. In this way evidently two good habits—one bodily, the other mental—were being formed at one and the same time: (1) the simple physiological habit of quietly beginning digestion before resuming activity; and (2) on the side of culture was being acquired a wide acquaintance with classical music. The perfect quietness of the boys at this time, as also at other similar times, as, e. g., just before and during chapel—and this as much before any master came in as after—struck me as a strong bit of fresh evidence that the too common noise in schools is largely the expression of imperfectly exercised activities, and as a striking proof that the teacher who has found normal outlet for these activities will not fail to get all the silence and attention he may require. Quiet was further insured by allowing the few boys of little or no musical ability or interest to read quietly, either their "term-book" or some other, and by letting one or two who might have been only a disturbing element find some less uncongenial outlet elsewhere.

In the afternoon the school split up into cricketers and hay-makers, the former to practice for a Saturday match; the latter to pursue hard yet happy work of their own, which protected them from the worthless habit of mere looking on and loafing, which has latterly made our games, however excellent for the few who actually play, so doubtful a blessing to the many who merely look on.

In the evening came one of the great functions of the Abbotsholme school year—the "Harvest Home Festival." This again



was simply and excellently managed. The "last load" was taken up the hill to the hay barn on its summit, in full procession, led by all the available music of the school—drums and fifes, bugles and violins, a simple yet admirable picture, a true pendant to Mason's "Harvest Home"—that most perfect of all our idylls of rustic English life. Nor was a deeper note wanting. Just before the procession started a bonfire of weeds was kindled—symbolically recalling the lesson read that morning in chapel, the Parable of the Tares.

After the load had been stacked, the boys gave a concert in the chapel, which, pending the erection of the future School Hall and Theater, has at present to be used as a big school for all such functions. Here solo singer and instrumentalist, school choir and orchestra, all took their appropriate part, and appeared, as far as I could judge, to advantage. I regret that from deficiencies of my own early years I am not able to express any opinion upon the musical technique; but I could at any rate appreciate the spirit of the whole performance, and note with satisfaction that the non-musical boys were few, almost every one taking part in orchestra or in choir.

Next came an ample and joyous harvest-home supper, followed by toasts, in which the haymakers and their captain, the head and his outside guests, were all included. After this came the harvest-home service in the chapel, with appropriately chosen psalms and hymns, prayers and lessons, all with brief personal application to work and life. Afterward, in a long and interesting talk, the headmaster set forth to me more fully his deeply meditated and constantly applied ideas of the moral and educative uses of productive labor, and of the correlation of occupations and studies with art and literature, with music and morals—in short, of living out day by day the unification of religion and of life.

The evening ended in storm, the wind and rain, lightning and thunder, emphasizing impressively, for boys and elders alike, the day's lesson and symbol: "Work while it is day."

Next morning I divided between the reading of batches of examination papers and the study of the administrative details of

the school, which are being gradually worked out in a series of sheets, well, indeed artistically, printed at the school press. As personally disposed in my own work to reduce formal regulation to a minimum, I must confess to having approached these elaborate regulations in a critical, indeed a skeptical, spirit. But I must also frankly admit that the more closely I studied these regulations, the more I saw in them. Beginning always with direct orders, simply expressed and easily obeyed, even by the youngest, they display the gradual development of a well-organized and well-administered scheme of action, so that the perfect order and discipline at haymaking or at swimming, which I had observed, was here set forth with corresponding clearness; in fact, not only summed up as custom, but codified as law. Indeed, I came to recognize this to be one of the carefully considered ways in which this school is organized to prepare its boys for intelligent action and citizenship in the larger world without; and my first dread of over-regulation was abated when I saw that the rules were, as far as possible, not an external code, devised in the abstract by the headmaster and imposed by his authority upon the boys, but a summary and codification of their own and their masters' practical experience; a body of laws, which practice and reflection, through successive years, had actually modified, and were still modifying. The school code thus becomes an introduction to the best aspects of law and order in the larger world, as well as to the modes of altering laws constitutionally open to an intelligent and orderly democracy. Though approaching this, as I have confessed, at first rather reluctantly, I came increasingly to recognize its educative value.

A very notable feature of these school regulations is that, as far as possible, each definite set of rules is prefaced by a well-summarized exposition of its higher aspects. Thus, in the case of haymaking, while two sheets were devoted to strictly agricultural matters, so as to satisfy the farmer, a third sheet was devoted to the larger educational aspect of the subject, showing the place of the hay harvest among the labors and festivals of the year. An outline was appended of ancient and modern views of the seasons, astronomic and historic, literary and poetic, thus

transcending the practical outlook to take in a long perspective of liberal culture. On inquiry of the boys, as well as of the masters, I satisfied myself that these rules and explanations had been of real interest and service, and were regarded by them as having greatly aided in the admirable function of the previous day, and this in all its aspects, economic and artistic, literary and ethical.

In this way I reached my first appreciation of the school, as successfully progressing toward reuniting two sides of life at present too much divided, and too exclusively assigned to the so-called laboring class and the so-called cultured class respectively. It is from lack—say rather the loss—of this union in our present education that the rustic is left rude, and the scholar left bookish; here plainly was growing up a healthier type than either, because correcting the respective defects by the corresponding qualities of both.

Similarly in other regulations, e. g., those for bathing, for “dormitory parade” (i. e., bed-making, teeth-cleaning, and so forth), for cabinets, etc. The simplest physical pleasure of bath or bathe, nay, even the humblest offices of the body, are thus not only made healthily habitual, but educative in the fullest sense, each being understood progressively from the standpoints of cleanliness and health, of intellectual clearness, of social and moral organization and responsibility.

Those sets of rules which apply at all times are framed and fixed in their appropriate places. Others, such as the bathing rules, after the appropriate season is over, are wisely withdrawn from view to reappear afresh another year. Thus no one can plead ignorance of either the law or its associated doctrine; and there is no doubt that in this way administration becomes not only more easy and effective, but obedience becomes willing and punishment rare.

On the whole, then, despite some minor reserve as to details here and there, which it is quite possible fuller experience might remove, I must confess to having been converted, and this in some measure against my will, to an appreciative and even approving recognition of this highly developed plan of school organization.

The same day I began visiting the lessons given by the differ-

ent masters. Beginning with the head, I heard a lesson in chemical theory vividly and clearly given. Thence I passed to a study of the outdoor occupations of afternoon school, to which much importance has always been attached at Abbotsholme from the first. Here the master in charge rapidly sent off various squads of boys to work. One large detachment, duly captained, went to clear a pasture of thistles. A small group was told off to attend to the bee-farm; some, to separate honey from the comb; others, to paint a wax-box; and so on. One or two boys had to repair and paint the canoes, while a small batch of youngsters went to their own little gardens. A larger number of juniors remained in the workshop, their work for that hour being to repair the hay-rakes, which, having naturally lost or broken teeth during the harvesting, had of course to be repaired before being laid aside for next season.

I visited the workshop on other days also, and can speak of all I saw in it, of its management and teaching, with eulogium. The work was at once useful and practical, requiring a reasonable measure of skill in both the handiwork and the working drawings, with clearness of head in both. The personal teaching, Socratic and sympathetic, I could not but admire.

At 4 o'clock, the two hours' afternoon school being over, the boys were free for games till 6. As I had examined the buildings the day before, I now went with a fresh boy guide over the whole school estate, when I was struck, on the one hand, by the very fortunate situation of the property, and, on the other hand, as befits such an excellent environment, by the healthy atmosphere and tone of the community itself. But, to assure myself that I had not got into the hands of exceptionally distinguished or specially selected boys, I joined, so far as time allowed, in games and bathing, and so came to make a good many individual acquaintances, as well as to know most by name and sight. The same evening, at evening chapel, the rustic spirit of the preceding day's labor was not lost sight of, Gray's "Elegy" being chosen as the lesson, which was read with sympathy and heard with attention.

After these two days of general inspection, I naturally devoted the rest of my week to a more detailed scrutiny of the teaching.

For this purpose I not only read all the examination papers, but was present at lessons by each of the masters in all the various classes. I also looked through a very large number of boys' notebooks, so as to form an idea of the work of the three terms of the current school year.

Leaving, at present, matters of instruction to the more systematic portion of my report, I may conclude this narrative by noting for special commendation in the afternoon school the open-air sketching classes and the drill. A small detail, but one characteristic of the practical resourcefulness which this school life appears to me peculiarly to develop, I may mention. I noticed that a youngster who had been marching badly was ordered to "fall out and join the small boys," who, some distance off, were being drilled by one of themselves. The youngster in disgrace fell out, looking crestfallen enough. But I was amused, on passing that way a few minutes after, to see that, to hide his own discomfiture, he had taken over the command of the little squad and was drilling it himself!

During my visit I had opportunities for conversation with each of the masters, and especially with the head. With the latter I went over both old and recent buildings, and visited the gardens old and new. I also examined the proposed plans for further extensions, and discussed, as fully as time allowed, the various aspects and needs of the school and its curriculum.

On the Sunday evening I was present in chapel at the headmaster's weekly sermon to the boys, and was again very favorably impressed by the frankness, directness, and intellectual suggestiveness of his teaching, its moral and social value, and therefore strength of influence, and this especially for senior, or at any rate thoughtful, boys. At both week-ends I had been struck by the number of old boys who were revisiting the school, and by the warmth and loyalty of their feelings alike to the place and to its head. Not being unacquainted with the progress and with the difficulties of the school since its foundation, I was gratified to have these best of all assurances, not only of its enduring vitality, but of its accumulating strength. The "Old Boys' Club" will

here doubtless serve as a valuable influence, and that increasingly.

To the question of health I paid much attention. Especially notable is the medical organization, which accompanies that minute and thorough organization of hygiene for which the daily school life and the new buildings are so carefully planned. Skilled medical aid is a mile or so away, but first aid of every kind is provided in a well-kept waiting-room and surgery, in which all accidents and ailments have to be regularly reported, and in which all the needful dressings and simple remedies can at once be found, slight cuts and bruises furnishing, of course, the staple cases. Under these circumstances the saying that "nobody is ill at Abbotsholme" seems almost to have passed into a school proverb; and I learned that during fifteen years no serious epidemics have occurred, excepting two outbreaks of measles, each at the beginning of term, and due to the sending of a boy already suffering from the disease. In the only case of dangerous illness (one of appendicitis) prompt treatment was successful.

As an example of the readiness and self-reliance of the young "medical officers" (a prefect, with his understudy, who will be in charge next term), I noted during my stay with interest that a cut deeper than usual had been promptly sewn, with due antiseptic precautions, by the boy-surgeon on duty, without calling in the doctor at all, or even referring the matter, as the rule advises, to the headmaster.

Looking into statistics, I noted that, while the medical diary for the school year now closing included nearly two hundred medical units (that is, visits per boy per day), the slightness of the ailments (mostly cuts, chilblains, colds, etc.) was evidenced by the fact that the total bills from doctor and druggist put together amounted to only about 25s.! Of the advantage of the "stitch in time" I can imagine no better evidence.

Next, looking closely at the boys one by one in the classroom or field, I could distinguish only two who showed any physical defect. One boy was evidently suffering from eye-strain; but his spectacles, I found, had only just been broken. The other had overcrowded teeth. As the school rules require the boys to

visit dentist and oculist during vacation, any neglect in these matters is due to the parents rather than to the schoolmaster.

Searching more and more closely after the explanation of this notable health and vigor of the boys, I explored the kitchen department, and inquired into the dietary. The food was not only ample and well-cooked, carefully chosen and varied, but skilfully and gracefully served also. The wholesome porridge and milk of the North, the substantial joints of English tradition, and the fruits and salads of the German table were all amply represented; I noticed, in fact—what I should have thought well-nigh impossible to boy nature—that the supply of strawberries at more than one table had been so generous as to outrun the demand. Rich and tasteful decoration gave the final touch of beauty to the spacious and well-lit dining-hall. The regrouping of the boys at the various tables for the three chief meals, so that the same do not sit together, but enjoy daily opportunities of conversation with a succession of boys, as well as masters, ladies, and guests, is again one of those many details in which Abbotsholme improves upon the too fixed monastic or barrack-like tradition of older schools, both in this country and abroad.

The school costume, too, shows the same attention to what is healthy and practical, convenient and becoming; again a notable escape from the archaic or conventional fashions so common in the school world.

Comprehensive and minute attention to hygiene is expressed throughout the buildings, and especially, of course, in the “new wing.” Having myself been largely occupied in the building, or transforming, of large houses to be residences for Edinburgh students—a responsibility closely analogous to that incurred in building a public school—I must not only express a general approval of the success of Abbotsholme in these matters, but the warmest particular appreciation of the skill and ingenuity of the plans, whereby attention has been given to every detail of health and sanitation, to every precaution against epidemics and against fire. I have before me two notable recent deliverances of the highest medical authority: (1) Dr. Hutchinson’s recent appeal

for the teaching of Hygiene in schools, and (2) the important report of Dr. Leslie Mackenzie on the "Health of Schools," prepared for the present Scottish Royal Commission on this subject, and I have pleasure in bearing witness that each writer may find his requirements more fully met at Abbotsholme than anywhere else I know of.

[*To be concluded*]